



**Lieutenant Colonel David S. Flynn, U.S. Army**

**I**N SEPTEMBER OF 2009, former Commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) General Stanley McChrystal formally requested additional forces in Afghanistan to fight a war that had begun eight years before. He warned that without additional forces the conflict would “likely result in failure.”<sup>1</sup> The situation appeared dire. In his initial assessment to the Pentagon, General McChrystal went on to say, “Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near-term—while Afghan security capacity matures—risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible.”<sup>2</sup> The critical component in gaining the initiative was partnering with the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) in a much more inclusive and integrated manner than in the past. In the Arghandab District of Kandahar Province in 2010, our battalion pushed the limits of partnership in a meaningful way to create irreversible momentum against the insurgency.

## Challenges

General McChrystal mentioned some of the shortcomings of ISAF units when he said that coalition forces had failed to aggressively defend the Afghan population. He said ISAF was “pre-occupied with protection of our own forces; we have operated in a manner that distances us—physically and psychologically—from the people we seek to protect. . . . The insurgents cannot defeat us militarily; but we can defeat ourselves.”<sup>3</sup> That psychological distance was evident in our failure to comprehend the complex social, political, economic, and cultural affairs of Afghan society. McChrystal’s report also highlighted the Afghan security force’s inadequate performance and interaction with coalition units. McChrystal called for “radically more integrated and partnered” work.<sup>4</sup>

That last phrase stuck in my head as I planned my operational campaign over the next few months, and it caused me to reflect on my background in counterinsurgency. I knew that we would have to fight this insurgency

Lieutenant Colonel David S. Flynn is currently a Joint Warfare course instructor at the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL. He commanded Combined Task Force 1-320 of the 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 101st Airborne Division, in Regional Command South as part of the Afghan Surge in 2010 and 2011.

PHOTO: CPT Jimmy Thomasson leads a combined sand table rehearsal with Afghan soldiers. This rehearsal preceded an attack to clear the village of Noor Mohammed Khan Kalache, August 2010. (photo courtesy of author)

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE <b>2012</b>		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED <b>00-00-2012 to 00-00-2012</b>	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Extreme Partnership In Afghanistan</b>				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>Headquarters, Department of the Army,U.S. Army Combined Arms Center,Fort Leavenworth,KS,66048</b>				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>MILITARY REVIEW, March-April 2012</b>					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>Same as Report (SAR)</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>10</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

in a vastly different way than we had during my previous tour in Kandahar in 2004. At that time, our battalion was at the large base on Kandahar Airfield and at one external combat outpost in a deserted area isolated from the population. Our connection with the Afghan people and security forces was evident, but it lacked a sense of depth and permanency. Our platoons conducted day and night patrols among the population but returned to base unseen by them. The Afghan security forces partnered with us during operations but then returned separately to their own camps. Our soldiers conducted temporary patrol base operations in villages, left after several days, and had no permanent presence inside the villages. We did not stop to evaluate our methods because there was relative peace in Kandahar in 2004, and the population was optimistic following the October elections.

Five years later, the approach and the security situation had changed. In September 2009 the 2nd Brigade Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division, led by Colonel Arthur Kandarian, began training to fight and win in Afghanistan by the following summer. Three months later it was announced that the brigade would deploy as the lead surge brigade of 30,000 Army forces to conduct operations in Regional Command (RC) South.<sup>5</sup> My battalion was one of four maneuver battalions from the brigade with the opportunity to employ counterinsurgency tactics. The Brigade Combat Team was the main effort in RC South from June to November of 2010, but our mission differed on this tour, mainly because it included protecting the Afghan people in partnership with the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police. Our destination was the historic Taliban stronghold in Arghandab and in the Zheri District in Kandahar province. Zheri is the spiritual homeland and birthplace of Taliban leader Mullah Omar, whose ideology still resonated with much of the population in the environs surrounding Kandahar City. The two districts were obvious places to concentrate forces against the insurgents.

## The Plan to Partner

Following General McChrystal's directives, Colonel Kandarian emphasized that the Afghan army must take ownership of the security in their country. To ensure our Afghan brothers did this, we needed to live, train, and fight side by side with them. For months before deployment, I said that we were going to partner "uncomfortably" with the Afghan army and police and that we would take extreme measures to ensure the Afghans assumed an equal risk in everything that we did. We planned to place the needs of the ANSF above our own in order to get them into the fight. We needed to anticipate that operations would be more complicated when we lived, trained, and fought side by side with the Afghan security forces.

Throughout our predeployment training, we planned for and implemented combined and integrated operations with the Afghan security forces. At Fort Campbell, we integrated Afghan role players dressed in full indigenous attire into all training scenarios. The scenarios included cultural nuances and language integration. We shared ideas with my fellow battalion commanders on techniques for integrating dismounted patrols with Afghan soldiers, and we practiced those methods. For our mission rehearsal exercise, the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC) at Fort Polk provided the most realistic Afghan scenarios I had witnessed since the start of the current wars. However, even the JRTC did not fully prepare us for the types of extreme partnership we had planned. Afghan civilian role players serving as ANA leaders were reluctant to reside in our tactical operations center. They preferred to return to their own "camps," as I had seen them do in 2004. The ANSF role players were reluctant to integrate with us during planning sessions. These examples reminded me of our previous deployments, although they provided insights about the challenges I faced later in Afghanistan.

We spent months describing and discussing how to integrate Afghan soldiers and police into

***We planned to place the needs of the ANSF above our own in order to get them into the fight.***

our formations, base camps, and our lives in the upcoming year. During the predeployment training, we did not know how many ANSF would be available to partner with us, so we made contingencies to follow the model of the Special Forces Afghan Local Police initiative while we were still at Fort Campbell.

We also spent many months conditioning our soldiers' minds to accept Afghan soldiers as our teammates and the Afghan people as the prize to protect. McChrystal's guidance said that the mission was to protect the population, but in this fight, the enemy is part of the population and distinguishing enemy insurgents from non-combatants can be extremely confusing and frustrating. In leader development sessions, we discussed eliminating the cultural bias that I believe exists in everyone to a certain degree. Our soldiers had to operate with the mindset that the Afghan people were our "brothers." It was a precondition for our partnership. General Petraeus, who assumed command in Afghanistan in July of 2010, continued to emphasize the importance of the indigenous people. He explicitly highlighted this in his counterinsurgency guidance: "Live among the people. We cannot commute to the

fight. Position joint bases and combat outposts as close to those we are seeking to secure as feasible. Decide on locations with input from our partners and after consultation with local citizens and informed by intelligence and security assessments."<sup>6</sup>

Inspired by 2nd Battalion, 508th Parachute Infantry Regiment, which we observed during the predeployment site survey in February 2010, we committed at the platoon level to living in small combat outposts among the people in the villages of Arghandab District.<sup>7</sup> The challenge the 2-508 Infantry faced, we learned, was garnering enough ANA forces to partner with at the multiple combat outposts spread throughout the district. Many Army leaders today disagree with this decision to partner with and live with Afghans at the platoon level. They believe that this method stretches a unit to the point where force protection requirements prevent it from patrolling effectively and conducting operations with an appropriate amount of combat power. I sought to saturate the community with small combined units that would challenge the insurgents in their own sanctuaries on a 24-hour basis. I was taking a calculated risk inspired by the desire to change the status quo of operations and establish a conduit for developing relationships with the people.



(photo Courtesy of author)

An RPG gunner suppresses a Taliban fighting position during the battle at Noor Mohammed Khan Kalache, August 2010.

## Meeting Our Afghan Warriors

Our battalion partnered with the 1st Battalion, 1st Brigade, 205th Afghan National Army Corps, when we arrived in Kandahar in June 2010. This unit was the second battalion formed as part of the newly established Afghan Army following the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Since 2003, it had operated primarily in the southern provinces of Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Helmand Provinces, including during the Marjah Offensive in 2010. It had collaborated with U.S. conventional and Special Forces for the duration of its existence and became accustomed to staging from large bases such as Camp Hero near Kandahar Airfield. As an experienced unit, 1/1/205 did not expect our new approach to operations.

As a surge battalion, we went to Arghandab District to replace Charlie Company, 2-508 Parachute Infantry Regiment, of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 82nd Airborne Division, and expand security along the northwest side of the Arghandab River. Our battalion task force combined with 1/1/205 was initially approximately 1,100 soldiers strong and grew to nearly 1,600 during the deployment with the attachment of two U.S. rifle companies of 1st Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, led by Colonel Jeff Martindale, and the Afghan National Police. In other words, our battalion was tenfold that of the unit we were to replace.

In June, C/2-508, the company my battalion would relieve, had three combat outposts with Afghan soldiers collocated at only one of their camps. The Afghan soldiers partnered with Charlie Company were reluctant to live away from their company headquarters. Charlie Company had two platoons living deep in the pomegranate orchards typical of the Arghandab. They were in the midst of the population they were there to protect, but had no Afghan partners. Their battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Guy Jones, advised us to coach the Afghan soldiers to partner at all the combat outposts as his forces transitioned out; our brigade commander, Colonel Kandarian, also directed this process. Our intent was to partner more effectively with the ANA so more Afghans could get into the fight—to “help create the conditions for the United States to transfer responsibility to the Afghans,” as President Obama put it in his speech to cadets at West Point in December 2009.<sup>8</sup> In previous tours,

we typically lived on separate compounds and did not share much intelligence information with the indigenous forces, for fear of compromise. In the previous eight years of conflict, the ANA saw U.S. and Canadian forces as mentors. This time we did not come to Afghanistan to advise the Afghans. We came to fight with them, side by side, or in the Afghan Dari phrase, *shonna ba shonna*—shoulder to shoulder.

Implementing the plan was not simple; management, cultural, and logistical challenges surfaced immediately. At my first meeting with our partners, I described the goal of living together, sharing hardships, burdens, intelligence, and serving as equals. The Afghan commander was wary about splitting his companies and platoons from his battalion headquarters and was concerned about the living conditions for his men.

As we brought additional forces, there was very little infrastructure in Arghandab District to accommodate two battalions of soldiers, Afghan and American. We would build combat outposts from the ground up. Our objective was to live among the populace rather than build a large-scale forward operating base to house more than 1,000 soldiers separated from the population. As we fought and cleared Taliban sanctuaries in the villages, we remained there and built combat outposts to help hold the terrain. We started with three such outposts, and the number grew to 17 over the course of the deployment.

## Sharing Hardship

As we worked to establish the outposts, tensions ran high between the Afghan and American soldiers. The Afghans were concerned that the Americans wanted to live in austere conditions but saw that the Americans had better resources to accommodate themselves. To assuage their concerns, we shared provisions with the Afghans. To demonstrate that we would strive to be equals in our relationship, we shared each other's food and water and lived side by side in tents or in the same mud structures to facilitate combined planning and intelligence sharing that was critical for mission success. The ANA began to understand that we were resolute in our cause, and relationships began to develop. The ANA command sergeant major said it was better to have separate showers, latrines, and kitchens since



***Pressing soldiers of both nations into close, austere confines under the stress of mortal combat created a volatile environment...***

his soldiers had different hygiene customs.<sup>9</sup> The ANA opinion on how we would collaborate allowed the relationship to mature in a way that was natural for both sides. Our command sergeants major agreed that soldiers should jointly maintain the combat outposts to include guard detail, police calls, and base defense maintenance, but this was not a smooth process. Sharp cultural differences divided Americans and Afghans. Pressing soldiers of both nations into close, austere confines under the stress of mortal combat created a volatile environment, but through shared hardship, the soldiers cultivated bonds of friendship. To this day, I maintain contact with several Afghan officers through email and social media, as do other soldiers.

## Cultural Acumen

Comprehending the Afghan culture is obviously essential to success in counterinsurgency. The Kandak commander requested assistance to build a makeshift mosque for his soldiers on the camp shared by our battalion headquarters elements. We provided it. He needed a speaker system for the Kandak mullah to announce the call to prayer five times a day. The local population and many farmers in the area could hear the mosque speaker for several hundred meters outside the camp. Because of the large presence of Afghan soldiers, the mosque, and the Afghan national flags billowing in the wind, the people in the community began to view our camp as an Afghan institution.

Our combined presence brought us closer to the local community in other ways as well. All 17 combat outposts were combined with Afghan soldiers or police at the platoon level. It was common for a local leader or resident to approach the camp and ask the Afghan gate guard to speak with the ANA commander to resolve local area security or economic development issues. U.S. soldiers could also communicate effectively with



the local populace. Learning some of the local language and using it while in the environment is essential to effective partnership. Our brigade brought Dari and Pashto language instructors to Fort Campbell before we deployed. Most soldiers participated in a five-week class to learn basic words and phrases, and a select few attended a five-month intensive program.

My counterpart, Lieutenant Colonel Mangal, spoke Pashto, and I committed to learn it so I could communicate with the local population we were there to protect. While deployed, I had sessions with my interpreter to learn the local dialect and to learn how to speak essential phrases. Although my skills were clearly not those of a trained linguist, the effort I made greatly aided the development of my relationship with Mangal, local leaders, and the people of our area. I met with Mangal without an interpreter many times, engaged in essential communication, and departed understanding the subject discussed.

In my commander's intent statement, I gave the battalion a key task—to develop genuine relationships with Afghans at the squad level.<sup>10</sup> I believed that an essential component of our partnership was with the people of the local area and our language skills were a critical component of that. Many Afghan elders noticed our soldiers speaking Pashto to the people; this helped our NCOs and junior officers get to know the villagers and farmers of Arghandab as well as the fields the farmers owned, the houses where they lived, how many children they had, and other facts about their lives. They did not solicit this knowledge to collect intelligence or determine a need, but simply to develop relationships and demonstrate unity with the population. In time, the relationships gave birth to intelligence, development projects, and information we used to eliminate or deter insurgents from putting down roots in the area.

Living among the people in our area and building relationships with them were instrumental to developing the Afghan Local Police. The local police augmented the national police by helping provide security in the more remote areas where the national police did not have a large presence.

In a previous *Military Review* article, Lieutenant Colonel Brian Petit discusses conventional forces mentoring and training the Afghan Local Police.<sup>11</sup>

	CTF TOP GUNS 1-320 / 1/1/205	<b>MISSION and COMMANDER'S INTENT</b>	13 JUL 10	
<p><b>Mission:</b> CTF TOP GUNS partners with ANSF and GIRoA to secure the people of Arghandab District beginning 1 JUL 10 IOT promote effective District governance, improve quality of life through economic growth and development, and protect the Afghan people to create the conditions for sustainable peace and prosperity.</p>				
<p><b>Decisive Point:</b> Decisive to this operation is the establishment of an effective coalition (ANSF, local tribal security, government officials) that rejects and can defeat the TB by limiting the INS ability to gain support and mobilize the people against GIRoA.</p>				
<p><b>Key Tasks:</b></p>				
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Partner (live, train, integrate, and operate) with 1/1/205 ANA on all operations.</li> <li>2. Build genuine relationships with the Afghan people down to the team level and continuously convey our message of hope to them.</li> <li>3. Facilitate equal representation of all villages and tribes at the District Shura through their Afghan Leaders.</li> <li>4. Build a Coalition of ANSF, Village Elders, Tribal Leaders, and local population that rejects the Taliban and supports the District Government.</li> <li>5. Hold and Build Village X (as a model for the West Bank) and expand (Clear and Hold) in Village Y.</li> <li>6. Defeat the Taliban fighters and shadow governance operating in Arghandab and eliminate Civilian casualties.</li> <li>7. Improve the Afghan Quality of Life through economic and infrastructure programs implemented by Afghan Leaders, sustainable by GIRoA, and acceptable by Afghan standards.</li> </ol>				
<p><b>Endstate:</b></p>				
<p>The People of West Bank perceive that they live in a safe district, led by a competent government, secured by an effective and legitimate ANA and ANP force, and that improvements in their Quality of Life and their environment indicate hope for a future thriving with peace and prosperity.</p>				

In concert with special operations teams led by Lieutenant Colonel Chris Riga, our conventional soldiers assumed a lead role in training, mentoring, and patrolling with local police organizations throughout the district. In the interim, the police forces we helped develop provided local defense to the villages where they lived. Captain David Ahern, commander of A/1-66 AR, pioneered the concept of conventional forces leading Afghan Local Police training. His men established a close partnership with Afghans in the village of Tabin to accomplish the task. ISAF and Department of Defense leaders subsequently recognized them for their initiative. Developing genuine relationships and living among the people made the program effective.

Our efforts were unique in that we rapidly expanded the program with our conventional force augmentation, so the Afghan Local Police came under some scrutiny. In October 2011, *Foreign Policy* online criticized the program and cited concerns that if the Afghan Local Police force was

left unchecked it could lead to abuse of power and create the kind of unwanted militias that have been a common cause of instability in the past.<sup>12</sup> However, the local police force effort in the Arghandab was not a militia but a vetted contributor to security. The key to success was the fact that our forces monitored the program in the villages and closely coordinated it with the district government and national police. We determined that the local police were effectively supporting our security efforts. In Arghandab District, the Taliban feared the Afghan Local Police. The insurgency was very much a local issue in Arghandab, and the local police force was essential to identify and prevent insurgents from establishing sanctuaries there. Our partnership with the national police in the district revealed this during routine collaborative intelligence-sharing sessions.

## Integrated Command and Control

Inside the base camps, combining command and control proved to be as significant a challenge

as sharing living areas. The Kandak staff, sorely undermanned, had officers to hold the S2, S3, S4, S6, and executive officer positions, but there were very few enlisted soldiers in the headquarters.

Our initial attempt to integrate Afghan soldiers into the battalion tactical operations center met with resistance. The Kandak commander insisted on a separate section of the headquarters building for parallel command and control. He was concerned that his soldiers would be too loud in our command center and that we might soon see things missing from the desks. The Afghan soldiers were typically uneducated and from varied backgrounds. Many were Tajik but their numbers also included Pashtuns, Uzbeks, and Hazaras. Most spoke Dari, but a good percentage spoke Pashto, the local language, including the Kandak commander and most of the 3rd Company whose soldiers were from Jalalabad. Their lack of education inhibited efforts to establish a combined operations center, but the fact that many of the soldiers spoke Pashto endeared them to the local population. In spite of such complications, the ANA was actually the most respected government institution in the district.

The battalion operated with parallel command posts located in the same facility (but not in the same room) for the first six months. There was simply not enough space to accommodate both staffs due to the lack of infrastructure, but we were adamant that the tactical operations center be integrated in the same room. This dynamic also manifested itself at the company level, although each company had a slightly different method of integrating command and control. Individual leader personalities influenced all aspects of partnering.

Housing our operations centers in separate rooms had kept us apart and prevented true collaboration, but we were able to update our command center to further improve our partnership. In December 2010, a Navy Seabees construction battalion built a wooden structure on our base camp to serve as our tactical operations center. The blue print provided equal office space for the entire Afghan staff and a command center large enough to accommodate Afghan command personnel, radiotelephone operators, planners, and analysts. After relenting for six months on the

parallel command structure, I finally insisted with my partner that we integrate in the new facility. The Kandak did not get any additional personnel for their staff but they moved Afghan troopers into our command center, and this helped us to share a common operating picture of the battlefield.

Our sharing of operational and intelligence information became transparent. We conducted command updates, intelligence briefings, and operational planning in a combined environment. Such sharing of intelligence and operations planning did not occur in any of my previous combat deployments. It was critical to building trust in our relationship and effectiveness in our operations.

Highly educated and experienced in his trade, the Kandak intelligence officer had the ability to develop sources that far exceeded our own and the daily collaboration with him was immensely beneficial. When we first met, Mangal was reluctant to agree to conduct any tactical operations without explicit approval from his brigade commander. I initially believed this to be a result of Soviet influence on his training and development. (Mangal had fought with the Russians during the Jihad of the 1980s and had attended formal Soviet military training.) I later learned that his reluctance was based on his initial level of trust of our unit. When we demonstrated that he and his staff were to be part of the planning process, he became more comfortable. Instead of asking for his brigade commander's approval to conduct operations, he briefed the commander about battalion operations.

Although it took nearly six months to achieve the optimally integrated command and control at the battalion level, this was far more than I had experienced in two previous combat tours alongside indigenous forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. In those operations, the indigenous force headquarters was on a different installation,

***Standard planning processes and troop leading procedures preceded all operations in which the Kandak participated.***



marginalizing real-time information sharing, combined planning, and intelligence development.

Together we overcame many obstacles in integrating joint American-Afghan intelligence and operational planning. I could see pride growing in the ANA as they shared combat experiences fighting the Taliban alongside our soldiers as well. Standard planning processes and troop leading procedures preceded all operations in which the Kandak participated. Terrain model rehearsals included Afghan leaders who could brief their part of the operation. We could not afford to plan in a vacuum and bring partners in at the last minute.

## Fighting Side by Side

Afghan soldiers, fully integrated with our soldiers day and night, patrolled the battlefield on foot in combined formations. A squad of Afghans typically led the patrol followed by a squad of Americans or vice versa. Colonel Kandarian mandated that we combine all patrols and operations. Any exceptions to the mandate had to be briefed to him for approval.

We had to make concessions to overcome obstacles in our partnership. For example, the ANA is

significantly under-resourced in night vision devices, and this caused them problems during night patrols and base defense after dark. Our solution was to loan night-vision devices to Afghan soldiers. This made many of our noncommissioned officers uncomfortable due to accountability concerns for sensitive items once we handed them to Afghans, but it was a risk I was willing to accept to keep our partnership moving forward and keep the Afghans in the fight.

I looked at it this way: transferring items to the Afghans provided an opportunity to teach accountability to our brothers. This exemplifies a principle I discovered: serving alongside Afghans as equals often provides a better teaching method than serving as an advisor or trainer. We transferred accountability to the Afghans with control systems implemented by American leaders living in the same confines.

Both American and Afghan units sustained casualties during many operations, and the medical evacuation was combined. American soldiers never left a fallen Afghan behind, and many risked their lives for their partners under fire. Corporal David Bixler earned the Silver Star for saving an Afghan



(Photo courtesy of author)

An Afghan M249 gunner fights side by side with an American soldier, August 2010.

soldier in a minefield while under fire during a combined patrol. Bixler lost both of his legs while the Afghan soldier sustained only minor injuries. This act, and other examples of soldiers sharing hardships and spilling blood for one another, created bonds. The Afghans truly felt like equals. We shared the same facilities, food, comforts, and hardships for many months.

After nearly a year of such fighting, the Afghans felt extremely confident in their abilities. Of course, the 1/1/205 ANA was already a seasoned unit when we first partnered with it in June 2010. As we were conducting a relief-in-place with the incoming American battalion, the ANA weapons company commander explained to me that the new unit told him they wanted to “train” his Afghan company. He proudly declared that his company had fought here for years and that he would “train the Americans instead!”

## Learning from Our Past

The positive experiences of 2010-2011 would not have been possible without our past deployment experience and the renewed emphasis on the population promulgated by Generals McChrystal and Petraeus. Including the ANSF in the planning and execution of all operations created a challenge that required all our mental

agility, adaptability, and flexibility. We found that our cultural training, including a language commitment, served as the cornerstone to success. The Kandak operations officer told our incoming American relief unit that our efforts to understand Afghans were appreciated: the key, he said, had been to “respect the people, their culture, and their religion.” Soldiers cannot do this unless they take the time to immerse themselves in that culture and live among the people.

Our success in counterinsurgency depends on our ability to leverage indigenous forces and provide security for a nation struggling for survival. Our methods were well received by most of the local population, the government, and ANSF. The results were soon evident on the battlefield and in the bonds we built in the local communities that were essential to pacifying the Arghandab. We could not maximize our effectiveness by unilateral occupation of outposts isolated from local forces and the people.

Convincing American soldiers to live side by side with an indigenous force imposes difficulties. It takes commitment, persistence, and cultural tolerance. We must be willing to accept risk to achieve victory in the long haul. The people are truly the prize. Connecting with them in a meaningful way is essential. **MR**

---

## NOTES

1. Eric Schmitt and Thom Shanker, “General Calls for More U.S. Troops to Avoid Afghan Failure,” online at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/21/world/asia/21afghan.html>>.

2. GEN Stanley McChrystal, Commander, International Security Assistance Force (COMISAF’s) Initial Assessment, Memo to the Secretary of Defense (SECDEF), Dtd 30 August 2009, 1-2.

3. Ibid., 1-2.

4. Ibid., 2-15.

5. In December 2009, President Obama authorized the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. The “surge” began with the addition of U.S. marines to conduct offensive operations in Marjah District of Helmand Province in February 2010. The remainder of the surge forces deployed to Afghanistan spread over a period of 8 months culminating in August. Second Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division comprised much of the second wave of forces and initiated combat operations in Kandahar Province in July 2010.

6. GEN Petraeus, *2010 COIN Guidance*, issued to all commands operating in Afghanistan in August 2010.

7. The concept consisted of collocating a U.S. platoon of 18 to 20 soldiers together with a platoon of Afghan soldiers numbering approximately 30. The typical combat outpost was a mud-brick home that the villagers agreed to lease to us. We expanded

out of the mud brick structures and built HESCO walls large enough to accommodate a parking area for vehicles, living space, and kitchen and field shower facilities. In many cases, the outposts were nestled inside the village with the local residents literally as our next-door neighbors. We assumed risk in order to become a genuine part of the community.

8. The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 1 December 2009, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on the Way Forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan,” online at <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-address-nation-way-forward-afghanistan-and-pakistan>>.

9. CSM Barrios was instrumental in establishing rapport with the Afghans. He had previous experience from earlier deployments and submitted a tactical lessons learned document that received praise from the COMISAF CSM at the time, CSM Hall.

10. My Battalion Commander’s Intent statement.

11. LTC Brian Petit, “The Fight for the Village: Southern Afghanistan 2010,” *Military Review* (May-June 2011).

12. Lynn Yoshikawa and Matt Pennington, “Afghan Local Police: When the Solution Becomes the Problem,” found online at the *Foreign Policy* website <[http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/27/afghan\\_local\\_police\\_when\\_the\\_solution\\_becomes\\_the\\_problem](http://afpak.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/10/27/afghan_local_police_when_the_solution_becomes_the_problem)>.